Fate/Zero - Another Story

Heart of Freaks

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Even monsters which possess the heart of a man-

There was no need for a man to possess the heart of a monster.

Just that – he wanted a monster.

A monster which surpassed everything.

However, it was difficult to make a monster.

Difficult, difficult…

In spite of that, he tried his best, and realized.

What I hoped for was not the action itself,

but the monster itself.

An old-fashioned Mustang – rented cheaply from a rent-a-car shop – was travelling in the endless wilderness at a high speed, unchanged since a few hours before. The car stereo was neither banging loudly with music, nor could any young, lovely voices be heard from the car.

An Asian young man was driving the Mustang. Although he was driving on this immensely long road, there was no trace of fatigue on his face. – That said, he did not appear to be enjoying himself as well.

His expression was cold. Neither bored nor upset – it was just cold.

He had once experienced hell before. Even as he was heading to hell now, all could be seen in his eyes was the extensive battle experience.

His name was Emiya Kiritsugu.

America…this place is pointlessly vast.

That was Emiya Kiritsugu's first impression of this country called America.

It was more than five hours since they purchased the necessary supplies at New York. They were driving along the empty highway.

There was nothing but the continuous, dull road. Activating his prana by a little, Kiritsugu drove away the drowsiness he felt…… if an accident were to happen at such a place like this, it would mean nothing but trouble.

Originally, she was the one driving. Thinking about that, Kiritsugu shot a glance at the woman sleeping at the front seat. The sleeping person seemed to be frowning in displeasure, as if she was deeply in thought about something……but Kiritsugu knew that she was just sleeping.

My, my – he sighed. And then, as if guessing his feelings, she opened her eyes, and said.

"What is it, boy? Is there something on my face, or did you feel itchy?"

"……Can we switch driving soon?"

To face the words of Natalia Kaminski head on (except in battles), would just be tiring and pointless – as the number one disciple of hers, Emiya Kiritsugu understood that fact very well.

"No. I am tired. While I was negotiating just now, you were just standing beside right?"

Negotiating…huh, Kiritsugu shook his head.

"……I had intended to keep protecting you."

The party they were negotiating with was as a matter of fact, a lowly gang. Over here, when you point at the weapons you want, they would show you the thing, and raise the price – such was the way they do things here.

The negotiations broke down, and what's left was the weapons they had chosen – there were no bodies left.

"I had pulled the trigger too early."

Silence. Embarrassing, but it was as Natalia had said. At the speed at which she pulled the trigger, she had won.

Actually, she should not have been able to win by reflexes.

Natalia Kaminski was the descendent of a half succubus from her ancestors. As an apprentice, Emiya Kiritsugu had started off from an extraordinary spot.

At first, she had surpassed Kiritsugu in everything – there was no chance he could win. Supposing there was one, it had to be an area which he did not learn from her, but had mastered it by himself.

“Besides, we had come all the way to America, and even now you haven’t told me the target’s name.”

“Hmm? Ah, come to think of it, I’ve forgotten about it.”

“Don’t forget such important things.”

“Sorry, sorry,” Grimacing, Natalia took out a picture.

“The plan is to meet the fellow who had made this.”

“……huh.”

For an instant, his heart leaped. The content of the picture seemed to be a combination of several human beings.

A body which was minced, then affixed together, then split apart. In the centre, there was a huge, pitch black hole.

“This was taken more than twenty years ago. They discovered this *thing* at Bavaria, north Germany. This picture is not clear, but apparently this thing was running on *eighteen horse legs*.”

“Horse legs, you said?”

Natalia smiled bitterly.

“A low-grade product huh. The man who made this was a magus called Heinrich Zepter.”

“What’s his aim of making such a thing?”

“Behold. “Resurrection of the dead”.”

“Resurrection……?”

Those involved in thaumaturgy would think about it at least once – the miracle of resurrecting the precious beloved ones.

“When I said “Resurrection of the dead”, what were you thinking about?”

“That’s-“

That’s the retrieval of the lost body, and the lost soul. And to recover the lost time.

Saying that, Kiritsugu recalled the faces of the man and the woman, but shook that thought off the next moment.

“Heinrich’s version of “resurrection of the dead” is a bit different from yours.”

Usually, the miracle called “resurrection of the dead” referred to what Kiritsugu thought previously – the “revival of the soul and flesh”. This was not something that could just be ignored. If the soul was not revived, and it was just a moving body, it would the same as a decaying corpse-eating ghost.

“If you manage to revive the body, then it’s good enough; the soul is not important – See, isn’t that heresy?”

“I don’t get it. Reviving only the body, what’s the point?”

“I’ve no idea. Maybe the creator doesn’t even know.”

“Why?”

“For generations, the Zepter family has been immersed in the miracle of the resurrection of the dead. Initially, they were concentrating on reviving bodies flawlessly. After that, they worked hard at joining body parts together. And finally, they tried to create living beings by joining different body parts and giving the creature bodily functions.”

– In the end, it wasn’t even “resurrecting the dead” anymore. Instead……

“Yup. They had wandered far from their intention. This is no longer “resurrection of the dead”, but the “creation of monsters”.”

Since a few generations ago, there were already signs that the Zepter family had been going on recklessly.

Flawlessly resurrecting the dead – but if the person was senile, or had died from an unexpected accident , it was impossible for their body to be perfectly revived to that before their death.

Because of that, if revival was necessary even if the limbs were severed – no, it was not limited to their limbs being attached to the torso, to revive the state of being short of a limb –

But, because of that, further advancement in the resurrection technique was required. The technique to join separated body limbs was necessary; to be able to join the nerves and enable the body to move. If the parts were insufficient, a technique was required to make up for those parts.

What was necessary was the technique to fully operate the body. In order to combine, synthesize, join, and operate all body parts, regardless of their states.

“And, were they reprimanded by the Association?”

“If an entire village was used as part of the experiment, even the association would lift their heavy butt up and take some action, huh.”

“……”

An entire village, at those words, Kiritsugu’s eyes clouded slightly. Formerly, he had seen an exact scene before – a hell where everything was literally laid waste.

“But Heinrich escaped death, and his whereabouts were not known hence…but.”

“He was discovered at America?”

“Exactly. The monster he created appeared in a village, and raged about violently.”

“That monster was?”

“American policemen are excellent. It was an unknown creature, but they killed it right then, and exterminated it successfully. Admirable clarity and diligence.”

That’s called excellent? – Kiritsugu thought, but he did not voice it out.

“And then, I received a call from the magus who had gone to recover the corpse. As a result of the investigation, it has been confirmed that Heinrich is at that village. And hence, here we are.”

“Finally I understood the mission.”

“That’s right. It’s to kill Heinrich Zepter, the magus who had wandered off from the right path, a.s.a.p. Any question?”

“No.”

Answering disinterestedly, Kiritsugu stepped on the pedal and accelerated.

After an hour, with the sun setting at the west, the village – “Present Mountain” – appeared abruptly.

There was a scribble at the entrance to the village. According to it, there were two thousand people.

Travelling on the unpaved road, the car jolted as it went on the stones.

“There’s a hotel over there. Let’s set up our base over there first.”

Nodding, Kiritsugu stopped in front of the hotel. The instant they opened the door and breathed in the dusty air, they realized they were being watched.

There was no killing intent – they were merely being observed.

“Oh my…”

Natalia muttered while removing their luggage from the car boot. She easily lifted the case filled with various weapons.

“Natalia, what do you think?”

“Well… Let’s hope they’re just curious. But we’ll have to consider the worst case scenario too.”

“We have to fight two thousand people?”

“The worst case scenario is, if he flees into the American wilderness barefoot.”

Saying that, Natalia smiled. She removed something small from the case she was holding, and handed it to Kiritsugu.

He caught it and felt that it was heavy. Activating his magic circuit, he almost felt at ease, but couldn’t as they were steeping up the staircase into the enemy’s territory.

Both of them entered into the hotel. The staff at the counter eyed them suspiciously.

“We’d like to put up for the night.”

“100 dollars per night.”

“30 dollars seem fine to me.”

“100 dollars per night.”

“……OK. 100 dollars a night.”

Natalia gave him two hundred dollars. Still looking at them suspiciously, the staff member put the keys on the counter.

“Room 208.”

“Kiritsugu.”

Nodding, he followed her and went up the stairs. At the last room on the second floor, there was a rotten door.

“Is there even a need for keys?”

Dumbfounded, but Natalia opened the door. Dropping the heavy case onto the bed, he frowned through the settling dust.

“Natalia, what’s next? Are we really staying for the night?”

“If the villagers allow us, that is.”

Saying that, she promptly took out the so-called modern weapons – firearms, ammunition, and grenades – and some magecraft equipments which looked like old-fashioned wands and animal furs, tied together by ropes.

Following suit, Kiritsugu started taking out weapons from the case.

By the way, at this moment Kiritsugu was still undergoing training. Hence, he had yet to arrive at that stage where he could use his “Origin” effectively and kill magi. Because of that, he still did not have his trump card in his later years – the Thompson Contender, and the Origin Bullet, nor had he acquired his “Time accel” technique.

Basically, his equipments were Natalia’s ideas, which functioned as her backup. His role was to release bullets at a huge amount, and also as a long-distance, one-hit-KO sniper.

From his case, Kiritsugu took out a Calico submachine gun. Putting that into the side pocket of his holster, he took the Weatherby Mark V Rifle from Natalia; and frowned.

“Am I really supposed to use this?”

Due to its tremendous force, it was not a weapon commonly used at the start of a battle, against the general magi.

“He is our enemy. We’re not just fighting some monster. So, with this, we can even destroy dinosaurs from the old age.”

Naturally, in the world of magecraft, there were creatures which could not be destroyed by this rifle – fantasy species. Still, it should be sufficient against the magus who would probably become their enemy.

Their opponent was a heretic magus who manipulated flesh, and created monsters…

But even if he were to stop using his magecraft, and begged for his life with tears flowing down his face, Kiritsugu would still pull the trigger on him without hesitating.

Kiritsugu gripped the thick rifle barrel tightly. Its weight gave him the feeling of holding a dangerous weapon.

“……”

The expression on Natalia’s face changed from a distant look to a knife-like sharp look.

Before Kiritsugu could ask anything, she indicated with her fingers – “it moves”.

“This room moves. I felt it.”

A murmur.

Kiritsugu realized it too. At the same time, he understood what he must do.

Quickly, he took out the directional anti-personal landmine from his case, and set the wire near the door. The instant the door was opened and someone stepped in, they would be ambushed by 700 iron spheres.

Without making any noise, Natalia broke down the wall of the room, and made a hole fit for a person – not exactly breaking down; she had slashed it into smithereens. Obviously, it was a technique which could only be done by the strengthening of her body abilities with prana.

After indicating that it was done, Natalia slipped through the hole into the room next door, and held her breath.

The sound of footsteps. Even Kiritsugu – still an apprentice – could sense the overflowing animosity.

Natalia stood in front of the door. Kiritsugu assumed the stance of a backup, and gripped the Calico submachine gun tightly.

There was a knock on the door next to their room. Natalia and Kiritsugu were both silent. The knocking sound gradually ascended into violent banging.

Kiritsugu gently placed his ear on the wall. He should be able to hear the sound of claymore mine being set off.

One of them was kicking the door hard.

The moment the door was kicked open, a thunderous sound could be heard, and the entire hotel shook.

Almost simultaneously, Natalia moved into action. With a single hit, she knocked down the door, and leaped over the remaining villagers who were armed with old-fashioned rifles and chopping axes.

Kiritsugu ran to the wall near the stairs nimbly, but stopped when he heard something. Recognizing the manager at the desk just now – now armed with an old-fashioned revolver – Kiritsugu opened fire without the slightest hesitation.

The staff members who were running up the stairs were bathed in bullets. Convulsing, blood splattered from them and they dropped dead.

“Let’s go.”

“Okay.”

Kiritsugu agreed with Natalia.

They sneaked out from the hotel backdoor, and observed from afar the villagers who had gathered at the hotel due to the explosion sound.

They were expressionless. Not surprised, not sad, not angry – they were merely gazing at the hotel, with their mouth closed. They were armed with rifles, pistols, scythes, axes, and other dangerous weapons.

Eventually, they moved sluggishly, and then ran right into the hotel. There were no fear, nor hesitation; not even anger.

After observing that, Kiritsugu handed over the binoculars to Natalia. Noticing that, she cursed softly.

– Usually, if a magus hid within a close-knit village community, he would probably take two different measures.

One, total isolation. Not getting involved with anyone or anything, hiding all the time even if he were to be criticized by those around him – the technique used by magi who loved tranquillity.

And the other cruel way was to place the entire village under his control.

Even in a tight country like Japan, a “village” community can be easily established. Consequently, if the entire village was placed under magecraft control, the probability of the magus being exposed would decrease drastically.

The measure Heinrich Zepter took was the latter. The villagers were completely expressionless. The reason they were cut off from their feelings was not that they could withstand something bad, but so that their brain activities could be restricted by a third party.

Probably so that news would not be leaked out – the location of the king of this village, Heinrich Zepter.

“Damn. If that’s the case, we won’t be able to find any clues by asking around.”

“How about capturing someone and question him with magecraft?”

At Kiritsugu’s suggestion, Natalia expression became more troubled.

“Our opponent is a kind of magus. He would have undertaken security measures for himself lest his location is revealed…”

“At this rate, the kidnapping won’t work.”

“……No choice about that. We’ll try what we can.”

Natalia sighed.

The two of them sneaked out of the backdoor of the hotel, and ran away crouching. After a while, they arrived at a place like a stable. Kiritsugu quickly clasped the mouth of a man who was taking care of the horses lazily, and held a knife at his neck.

“Don’t move! Keep quiet!”

However, even after he had done all of these, the man did not seem resentful, or surprised, or afraid – his face was perfectly blank.

Holding the mouth tightly, Kiritsugu tried to make the man understand that they meant business; but he wasn’t sure if that man understood it or not.

“We are looking for a man called Heinrich Zepter.”

In spite of that, Kiritsugu still asked. To prove that the knife wasn’t fake, he lightly cut the man’s face.

“You don’t have much time left. Answer!”

The man nodded slowly. He pointed at an easterly direction from the stable. After that, he lifted three fingers.

“Three kilometres from here to the east? Or is it 300 metres?”

He shook his head, then nodded – looks like the latter was correct.

After that, the moment when Kiritsugu tried to kill the man with the knife–

The man’s back moved slightly.

“Boy, move!”

At those words, Kiritsugu stopped trying to stab the man, and rolled instantly to one side. At the same time, a third arm appeared from the back and slashed at the space where he was at with great force.

It was a strange arm. It was long and powerful, in spite of the appearance of a dried-up mummy-like arm.

The arm swung and attacked Natalia directly. Like a ball, she was sent flying and hit the wall.

“Natalia!”

At his shout, Natalia commanded him without any doubt.

“Shoot him!”

Instantly, Kiritsugu acted – holding the Calico submachine gun in one hand, he pressed the trigger with the other.

With a strong determination which caused the rifle to blur slightly due to recoil, Kiritsugu rained more than 20 bullets on the man.

Without even groaning, the man collapsed.

“……?”

Kiritsugu felt that something was amiss. Obviously, it was not his first time shooting a person; but he felt as if he had just gunned down something different.

“Boy, look!”

Natalia kicked the body over, and Kiritsugu understood why he felt that way.

“He didn’t bleed at all.”

“Yeah, it’s that. Something like a corpse-eating creature. From the outside he appeared to be alive, and he could think a bit too. But the inside is- “

Removing the knife from the ankle, in one go, she cut open the body from the chest to the stomach, and revealed its contents.

“ –empty. Look at this. There’s only the lungs and the heart. The rest were already removed……hmm, is it because those were the only necessary parts required to live and talk?”

“Natalia, now’s not the time to be impressed. Let’s leave here quickly.”

“That’s right. The villagers should be rushing here after hearing that loud noise-“

Something huge squirmed behind Natalia. She saw the panicked look on Kiritsugu’s face, and felt a strong killing intent, as if something was going to attack her from the back.

Crouching, Natalia displayed her superb body reflexes by aiming a powerful kick behind her.

“Hey, hey.”

Even Natalia became dumbfounded, and gazed at the creature in front of her.

It was a horse.

There was nothing unusual about it being a horse.

And there was nothing unusual about her attacking it.

The only unusual fact was that the twin-headed horse was that, it was *perfectly fused together*.

The place where they were joined was sticky, like molten chocolate. Among the eight legs, two of them were like the man just now – full of wrinkles like a monster.

“……A fine taste its maker has.”

Grumbling, Natalia kicked the huge creature again. Catching the trembling horse, she strengthened her arm with prana, and severed the horse.

However, the horse raged about, trying to kick Natalia. Somehow, whilst she was trying to hold the horse down, an arrow was shot at her.

Still, Natalia’s senses were extraordinary. The instant she sensed the approaching arrow, she held the horse’s neck up with both hands, and released a powerful kick – the arrow which was approaching was broken mid-air.

Kiritsugu perceived the villager who was aiming at them with bows and arrows on the rooftop. Without waiting for Natalia’s orders, he swiftly aimed his rifle at him and fired.

Along with the rattling sound, his shoulders felt numb. A large hole appeared at the man’s chest.

“……Damn it!”

It was her negligence, otherwise the creature was stronger than she thought. The twin-head horse escaped from Natalia's grip.

The horse *glared at both of them loathingly*, and retreated swiftly. They were amazed, but moved quickly.

"It's going to…climb the wall!?"

The huge horse was surprisingly quick-witted – it nimbly climbed up the wall of one of the village houses.

Kiritsugu quickly aimed his rifle, and shot at it. It hit the wall planks – it felt like a direct hit.

Whilst limping, having climbed onto the rooftop, the twin-headed horse turned one of its head aside and started galloping on the roof.

"……Do you have two hearts?"

Kiritsugu wanted to curse himself who had looked past the obvious fact.

Wait! At Natalia's anger-infused shout – but with a high-pitched shrill, the horse had leapt and galloped towards where the villagers were gathering.

A leap like that of a life-sized frog. Natalia could probably chase after it, but at that moment it was obvious that she would bump into those villagers.

"What are you going to do? Are you going to attack?"

At Kiritsugu's words, Natalia showed a moment's hesitation. It was something rare for a woman who made decisions spontaneously. But, thinking about it, there were only two choices in this situation –to escape or to attack.

At least, those were the only ideas which came to Kiritsugu's mind. To haphazardly discover the headquarters of magi was the height of their folly.

However –

"No – we won't attack."

"So, we escape?"

"No – we won't run away."

Natalia presented a third option.

Looking at Kiritsugu, she grinned broadly and said.

“I will die. And then, you bring the horse to Zepter’s.”

Which made Kiritsugu dumbfounded.

After receiving the reports of the twin-headed horse, in great numbers the villagers brought the animal to a stable. They numbered to about half of the entire population. And then, they discovered a woman who was walking unsteadily.

Someone inserted an arrow into a bow, and released.

Somone pulled the trigger of an old rifle.

And it all ended. Being shot at the elbow by the bullet, and the abdomen by the arrow, the woman collapsed slowly.

The villagers surrounded the woman’s corpse, looking at her.

“She’s dead.”

Yeah.”

“We should bring her to the doctor’s.”

“The doctor’s not around.”

“Umm. Sawyer is here.”

“There’s no proper facility here. Let’s leave her with Sawyer and the others.”

“Let’s do it.”

“There might be another one out there.”

“Find him too.”

Drowning her consciousness, without taking any breath, with her heart perfectly still, Natalia was literally “dead”; only her hearing was still functioning.

Consequently, the depths of her consciousness responded to the word “doctor”, and came to a conclusion after pondering –

Doctor, i.e. “the one who heals them”, had to be Heinrich Zepter.

Okay, bring me there, to Heinrich Zepter's place.

Kiritsugu had sneaked into a deserted house, and heaved a sigh of relief after feeling Natalia's prana left. Looks like the wall could be broken down. It was fortunate that the villagers did not take any reckless action like dissecting the corpse on the spot.

But, now's the critical moment for Kiritsugu. First of all, he must locate where Natalia's prana was headed to by dowsing.

That was relatively easy, but the problem was how to get there. To get there by slipping through the two thousand villagers without being noticed.

"Oh well, that boy should be able to work something out."

Natalia said that while sniggering, at the same time heading to the place of death.

"Naturally, he'll be able to do something."

Whilst mumbling that, Kiritsugu focused his nerves more. Hanging from a string, a shining stone started moving without being touched. Before long, the stone pointed towards a point right ahead.

"……East huh?"

After making sure there was no one nearby, he slipped out quickly from the exit of the house.

Being carried by the villagers, Natalia was transported to the doctor's house.

She predicted – that Zepter would not believe the villagers' careless declaration of her death.

She predicted – that at the instant Zepter saw her, he would try to kill her.

She predicted – that because of that, instead of giving his recognition towards her, he had to move first, and take control of the situation immediately.

She predicted – that the villagers would say "The doctor's not here. Is he away?" Anyway that would be convenient. Since there were a thousand of them over there, they would not be too difficult.

A question – Who was “Sawyer”? The doctor’s representative? Then he must be his apprentice or assistant. In any case, if he’s someone who continues practicing his craft, then he must be taken care of too.

A wish – She wanted the villagers to not linger at the doctor’s place after dropping her off, but to return home promptly.

She heard the sound of a door opening somewhere. She heard the creaking sound of the floorboard from someone treading heavily on it.

Natalia grasped that she had arrived. Because she was not breathing, she could not smell the odour, but by sensing with her skin, she could understand that she “had entered into the house”.

She suppressed her prana as much as she could. With the information she had been relaying, Kiritsugu should have already known the location of this place. Her strategy was based on that assumption.

“Sawyer……bring the ingredients here.”

“They’re ady dea." (They’re already there.)

A thickly accented voice. Looks like this is the guy called Sawyer.

Together with the sound of dragging feet, she could also heard the sound of some metal scratching the floor. However, she still could not open her eyes.

The villagers were leaving. The sound of footsteps gradually faded, and with a long creaking sound, the last person shut the door and left.

After confirming that for a few seconds – firstly, she activated her vision. Without moving her head, her eyes observed her surroundings. Just like what she expected, there were no medical tools, but on the wall were all types of magecraft tools, a dissecting hammer, knives, and machetes. In the glasses on the shelf, with five arms and sharp fangs, foetuses were looking at her with blank pupils.

On the crowded floor were heaps of magecraft books– there were not rare books, but still very expensive – strewn all over and stacking high up. The wall, the bed, the lighting; everything was shabby, but without a doubt, this was a magus’s workshop.

Natalia firmly believed that.

This place was Heinrich Zepter's residence.

"……What? You're still alive?"

Simultaneously, she jumped from the bed – activating her magic circuit, she broke Sawyer's neck, who was still taken aback.

"Oh?"

After breaking his neck, Natalia realized something. Sawyer's face had assumed a mysterious expression, like that of a surreal painting.

And then, in spite of the fact that Sawyer's neck had been broken, he was still alive. Alive, and moving.

"What are you doing!"

Broken off and hanging loosely, without putting his head properly back, Sawyer attacked with a machete rusted from blood.

Evading that easily, she concentrated prana in her hand, and delivered a karate chop at his neck – his body was severed into half.

She stepped back from the gushing blood. This time, Natalia really believed that she had finished him off. The man in front of her – be it a magus, or a corpse-eating ghost, or any other creature, at the point when his heart was split away, he would lose all his bodily functions.

– That was supposed to be the case.

"Wh…….?"

She was stunned. Split cleanly into half, with blood and intestines still oozing out from it, the corpse *wriggled*.

The remains of the body on the left and right helped and supported each other, as the body tried to stand.

"Move……gi…vide…videeeooo……"

“ – Whatever research he’s doing, I’d have never thought of such a disgusting monster.”

Sighing in shock, she kicked Sawyer – who tried to attack her – away.

“No……way…”

“Where is the “doctor” who created you? If you don’t tell me, I will cut you up until you can’t say a word.”

Picking up the machete, Natalia held it at Sawyer’s throat.

“Doctor…..THERE……”

With a shaking finger, Sawyer pointed at the bookshelf. Natalia thought there was an exit at the back of the bookshelf, but looks like that was not the case.

“Ttt, televv….television……”

Sawyer’s excited finger alternated between the television and the bookshelf. On the bookshelf were some nonsensical magecraft books, something like the clinical records of the villagers, and –

“Videotape……?”

Television and videotape?

For a moment, Natalia’s attention was diverted away from Sawyer who was squirming behind her – or rather, she did not sense anything aiming at her. Because of that, the instant she turned around, along with the sound of the wooden floor tearing, she could not stop Sawyer from being swallowed by a tremendous speed.

“……!?”

Panicking, she rushed towards a hole that had appeared out of t he floor – pitch darkness, as if leading towards the depth of hell. Nothing could be seen. She lighted a fire on a tobacco and threw it inside.

The small red light dropped into the depths of the hole before slowly disappearing.

“Well then……”

After being lost for a while, Natalia lit up the second tobacco, picked up the videotape and medical records, and sat in front of the television.

There were at least freaks in this village who could drag a dead body away in an instant. If that's the case, obviously she would need to obtain information on how to go against it. The person in the playback of the video was the one she had expected.

"Transcending the video, or rather, I'm glad we finally meet, Heinrich Zepter."

Murmuring that, Natalia smiled coldly.

Emiya Kiritsugu had confirmed that the building to which Natalia had been brought. Ahead of him was not just the building, but a building from which the deep stench of blood could be smelled; a place like no other.

The evil magus's workshop was used for all sorts of biological experiments, and had taken in all sufferings, and despair. That was a sinister scene, indescribable by a single word.

At the sense of odiousness which surpassed his father's workshop last time – a place where Emiya Kiritsugu had despaired of the world – whilst bearing the ice-cold cruelty, he slowly entered.

"You've come."

He nodded at Natalia's words. Inasmuch as being under such circumstances, she was settled on the sofa, watching the television. He almost blurted out words of incredulity, but after noticing her pointing at the television, he turned towards the screen.

"Zepter……?"

"Yes. Boy, looks like this is a *love-letter from hell.*"

A long-haired man was on the screen. His beard covered half of his face. From his sunken eyes shone neither madness nor nothingness, but rationality.

"- Hunters from the Association. My name is Heinrich Zepter. The man you are after."

There was no hint of triumph from his voice – he was just informing them of the fact out of plain indifference.

"Years after all of you look at this video, I am no longer in this world in 1978."

"……Not in this world? Are these his last words?"

Kiritsugu frowned.

“A magus? Last words……?”

Natalia whispered.

“It is true that the Zepter family, had been lost from the right path. We were able to resurrect people – to revive the body, to revive the knowledge stuck in the brain, and| to restore even the destroyed magic circuits|. Since we have come this far, what remains is just to research into ways to call back the soul of the dead. But still, we specialize not in the spirit, but in the revival of the flesh.”

He shook his head as if he was bored.

“A finger, a strand of hair, claw, eyeballs – this is the technique to resurrect the body flawlessly from all of these. Alternatively, replacing a lost arm with another person’s, and to make the body recognize it as its original. And finally, to be able to induce the recognition of new parts of the body, and to make it move.”

He was silent for a moment, and muttered.

“……Having done all of these…so what? It’s boring, and no matter what words I use to describe it, this is *no more than a mere toy*.”

“Yeah, that’s right.”

Natalia murmured – and Kiritsugu agreed as well.

This technique was indeed something to be praised. If that was not something magical, but something developed from purely scientific techniques, that would no doubt have a huge impact on the world.

However, from the magecraft’s point of view, that was just a simply useless technique. Who would want a technique which mass produces the living dead?

At this point, Kiritsugu realized something.

Until a moment ago, his image in the television – there was definitely a glint of intelligence in his eyes. There was also a note of rationality in his voice.

But, as he progressed in his explanations, they gradually disappeared.

“ – Yeah, nothing more than a toy. But, though we – no – I seek the origin like other magi……*I am helplessly attached to those toys.*”

"……"

Madness was seeping from the entire body of the man in the screen. With a stiff smile, it was as if darkness was overflowing from the opened mouth.

"That's right. I am helplessly attached to them. I had fallen in love with them. *The creatures that I invented give me joy from the bottom of my heart!*"

Looking at his boyish smile, Kiritsugu thought to himself – he had fought with magi who had strayed from the right path, many times. With an attitude which appeared to be a kind of ascetic monks, they carried out their actions of extreme brutality – but compared to them, Zepter was a *truly interesting person.*

Kiritsugu even felt like he was being caught at his heel, and being slowly dragged away by this person. His vision dimmed, and started swaying…

"Boy, don't be overwhelmed by it."

Saying that, Natalia pressed the tobacco she was smoking, against Kiritsugu's hand.

"……tsch!"

At that instant, his consciousness returned along with the pain he felt.

"You can get drunk on wine, but a hunter caught up in madness should be disqualified, don't you think?"

At her severe admonishment, Kiritsugu could not help but to grimace.

"Just now……"

"It was not magecraft. It was just a hint. That's probably why you didn't understand huh……That was *pure madness.* His aim, his course of life, his interest and hobby are united. From a magus' point of view, this is the worst handicap to us."

Motive – to play with corpses. Course of life – to play with corpses. Interest – to play with corpses. Hobby – to play with corpses.

"There are six hands, and they are moved simultaneously. Four legs, breaking into run simultaneously. Two heads, thinking at the same time, being embedded in the body and giving sight to the outside world…..Yeah, *it's really fun! It's the best!"*

Kiritsugu was the first to realize this.

"Natalia……the floor in the screen, is it not moving?"

"Eh?"

Murmuring, Natalia shifted her attention towards the floor in the screen. Indeed, it was moving. Wriggling convulsively, as if it was a living thing.

“I invent monsters, invent invent and invent. It’s a shame, but at the same time, I know that I have strayed from the right path of humans and magi in the pursuit of my interest. That’s why I came to America; in this forsaken land, so that I can use the land and its people and carry out my research to my heart’s content. “

“……that research, as much as he wants?”

Seeming satisfied with himself, he took a deep breath.

“Yes, I am helplessly satisfied. Fusing babies and old people, creating three-headed man…… Even Hekatonkheires – I can recreate a miniature size of him. That’s why I am satisfied. Now, there’s only one thing left from my imagination.”

Right now, it was not just the floor trembling, but the entire place itself. Gulping, Natalia and Kiritsugu watched on.

“*And that’s to turn myself into a monster!* – Isn’t that a cool ending??”

Together with his words, Zepter was wrapped in something huge, and together with a shout of sheer delight, he was swallowed completely.

The video stopped, and noise appeared on the screen. The two of them stood up, and started moving.

“That guy *turned himself into a monster*?”

Kiritsugu asked, and Natalia nodded.

“……Well, it didn’t mean anything. For a magus who had strayed from the right path, it’s not surprising however mad he ended up in. Usually, it is logical to associate such people with absurdities; thus such things are recognized as the norm.”

Natalia turned over abruptly, and said to Kiritsugu.

“This applies to you, and me too. |If we strayed a little from our paths, we will fall.| Like the Zepter family, while they cut themselves from the outside world and carried on with the experiments, without realizing it, they walked on a wrong path before long. That madness will visit you in the blink of an eye, and take away your sanity.”

Kiritsugu was silent.

Natalia’s technical and magical lessons – all of them were important, but he thought that her words right now were more important than all of those.

“Insanity will disguise you. Those who have been controlled by it can even seem to be civilized gentlemen.”

“- So how do you see through the mask?”

“Don’t judge a book by its cover. It’s okay to trust your instincts, but don’t rely on your desire alone. And also, don’t get lost.”

Both of them gazed at the gaping hole on the floor –

It seemed like the path to hell.

“All right……time for the hunt.”

Kiritsugu nodded, and holding Natalia tightly, both of them jumped.

5 meters.

10 meters.

15 meters.

When they dropped to 20 meters underground, Natalia finally caught sight of the ground. She pushed her free hand against the wall. Scratching the wall with her nails, she slowed their descent.

Whilst feeling the tremor from her back, Kiritsugu wondered if they could ever ascend from this place again, and started exploring escape options.

Natalia’s ascent stopped, and Kiritsugu got off from her back.

“……It’s really vast.”

Natalia nodded and smiled at Kiritsugu’s words which were similar to her feelings of America.

They had arrived at a huge natural cavern. It was hard to tell how wide this place was.

But this cavern was unmistakably as vast as the entire village. And then, despite the pitch darkness which seemingly negated all existence, both of them confirmed something else.

Something is here…

Something incredibly dangerous, heretic, repulsive, and frightening.

At the very least, something not human – the associates of non-humans.

And.

|Because of that, both of them had to face each other.|

Once again, both of them were magi (aliens) who had departed from the boundaries of normal human beings.

With magecraft, Natalia created a small lamp, and Kiritsugu started walking forward.

After walking for a while, Natalia could smell the stench of something decaying. An odour of repulsive decaying meat. The sound of meat squashing against meat could be heard from the darkness ahead.

Immediately snuffing the lamp, they walked on whilst getting used to the pitch black.

And then…they saw it.

To illustrate, it was like a gigantic queen ant.

From the incredibly huge oviduct, *a human was being born*. Wrapped in gooey liquid, it fully clothed – and it was a face that they remembered.

The man Kiritsugu should have killed.

“This guy, is he the hotel-“

“Yeah, the hotelkeeper who received us.”

Wiping the viscous liquid with his hands, he stood up unsteadily, and headed deeper into the cave.

“Which means, the villagers who had attacked us so far……”

“*All of them were this man’s children.*”

It was undoubtedly a creature beyond Kiritsugu’s wildest dreams. Seeing that figure, it was hard to even maintain his sanity. His steel-like resolve, the rifle in his arms, and above all, Natalia’s extreme composure – all of these had rescued him from the abyss of insanity.

Quietly containing the madness, he waited for instructions; and thought about possible instructions.

“Well then. The unpleasant, Beelzebub-like monster ahead of us, is our target – Heinrich Zepter. But……what do you think we should do?” “We must kill him.”

“Correct. Now boy, how are we going to do that?”

“Destroy him completely with fire. Luckily, we have a sufficient supply of explosives. We strike him in one shot, before he can react.”

Natalia nodded.

“Your suggestion is good. If we go easy on them, they will be joining the villagers too.”

“So…”

“There’s only one problem. Is that thing as ugly, thick-headed and stupid as it looks on the outside? Or, does it still have Heinrich Zepter’s intelligence?”

“If he still has intelligence, then…?”

“Then he would have already known for a long time that we are here, and that we are thinking of how to attack him; things like that. And then, he would have already thought of how to counterattack. We would either be mutilated and killed, or being kept as slaves. One of them.”

“……”

“But, we will survive this. If anything happens, there are ways…”

“Retreat?”

“Nono, we won’t retreat. I want to set up some preventative measures.”

Saying that, Natalia took out a weapon from Kiritsugu’s backpack.

“What are you going to do with it?”

“I’ll hide it first. It’s our *trump card*.”

Natalia grinned fearlessly.

“Boy, are all the preparations done?”

Nodding, Kiritsugu set up the Weatherby Mk V rifle. Just like what Natalia said, this gun was perfect to attack the creature.

“Well then, I’ll be back.”

She stood up, and walked briskly towards the monster in front. The compound eyes stared at once at her.

Not bothered by it, and without a hint of fear in her, Natalia bowed formally.

“Hi, Heinrich Zepter. Nice to meet you.”

The monster was silent. Then, without opening his mouth, he spoke to Natalia in her mind with telepathy.

“It’s an honour to meet you too, Natalia.”

“……How do you know my name?”

“*The entire village is me.* There’s nothing not known to me. Not even that lad hiding over there, aiming at me.”

“……”

Kiritsugu was silent. He had the rifle readied, and was waiting for the signal.

“I see, you have indeed succeeded. *That is a limitless body, approaching even immortality.* But still, you are a human.”

“- Indeed. I, Heinrich Zepter, am certainly a sane human, and am loving this body.”

“Well then, do you intend to manipulate these villagers which are parts of yourself, and to live a peaceful life like this forever?”

“No way. I am still a human – a magus. Thus, I have desires too.”

“It’s not that you want to be recognized…You want to reach the Origin? To use your immortality to reach the territory so desired by everyone?”

Zepter’s subsequent sneer at her words could even be sensed by Kiritsugu.

Origin – the goal more or less all magi were seeking; the swirl of the beginning and end of all things.

“I want to ask something too, magi-hunter. *Why don’t you seek that?*”

“Because there’s no need to desire it. I’m not satisfied like having the entire world to myself, but I am not so hungry for it to the extent of being willing to throw the world away.”

“It’s the same for me. I love this chaotic world. So what if I understand the beginning and end of this world?

‘All things are there’, all these sayings are boring. What I wish was just *how far I can transform myself – something as simple as that*.”

“Oh? We get along well, don’t we?”

Grasping her fist, Natalia activated her magic circuit, and activated an extremely powerful magecraft – obvious to even bystanders.

“- Yeap. That’s why in this world one person would be enough!”

The instant he received the signal, Kiritsugu did not hesitate and pulled the trigger. A thunderous roar resounded in this cavern, blowing away Zepter’s compound eyes.

Natalia started running swiftly. Innumerable hands surged forward to contain her.

“ – Too naïve!”

Her right light shone, and sliced the arms away.

The nightmare which could hoodwink men and suck their soul till its dry – Natalia, whose ancestors were succubus, possessed a special type of power.

Which was – a boost to release all her preserved prana in one go. Like fighter jets Increasing its propelling force by 50% by means of afterburners, Natalia’s strength in her arms, legs; her endurance, her instantaneous force – all her bodily abilities were greatly amplified.

It’s something similar to the enhancement of the body by means of rune magecraft, but for a much shorter period. But to compensate for that, Natalia used extreme violence.

Berserk – Natalia had absorbed parts of the souls of her close magi acquaintances to prepare for this battle.

She swung her arms and severed.

Her legs pierced into the body, and kicked it open into the intestines.

The strong gastric acid gushed out – she avoided the downpour-like liquid with minimal steps.

At the same time, with a machine-like accuracy, Kiritsugu had been pummelling him with the rifle. The Weatherby Magnum bullets – which boasted of a monster-like weight of 500 gram per bullet – continued blowing Zepter's flesh away.

He was not tough, but quite weak. After all, his flesh was made from men and beast bodies. But, because of that, his body scattered and absorbed the bullets. It was as if shooting at a block of mud. Even if hit by the bullets, it would revert back to original immediately.

Subsequently, Kiritsugu felt impatience creeping upon him. However, in spite of that, the hands which were pulling the trigger, and the eyes which were targeting it – none of those would let the monster live.

And then – Natalia's movements slowed abruptly. Kiritsugu's ultimate fear had happened.

The price for granting the berserk-like strength to her body – the supposedly enormous amount of prana stockpile had been cut off suddenly.

Natalia had switched back to her normal consumption of prana.

It didn't mean that her prana had been cut off completely. The prana consumption had decreased, and naturally, her body abilities weakened steeply.

Zepter did not miss that opportunity. She was caught by 10 remaining hands. His compound eyes stared at her in unison. Her breath quickened and she perspired, but yet Natalia laughed.

"… *Welcome to my village.*"

At the same time those words were uttered, a huge hole cracked in the middle of Zepter's abdomen… and Natalia was swallowed "inside".

"Natalia!"

It was impossible for her to hear him. But, understanding this fact, Kiritsugu still shouted out to her.

Zepter changed his target to Kiritsugu.

"Well then young man. You hold the future in your hands. You're next. *Come and live within my body*."

The huge wall of flesh approached Kiritsugu, who was standing still. |That's it huh|, Kiritsugu had resigned to his fate.

At that moment –

Zepter's oviduct swelled suddenly, and erupted in flames.

"Wh-a…!?"

Confused, Zepter forgot about Kiritsugu who was in front of him, and thrashed about. Kiritsugu recalled the weapon Natalia removed from his backpack earlier on - *the TH3 incendiary hand grenade.*

– Do it now!

At those words, Kiritsugu readied his rifle reflexively. At that instant – Zepter's abdomen was blasted into smithereens, and Natalia tumbled out from it.

And, Kiritsugu saw it. *He was in the abdomen.*

He was as thin as a mummy, but from his blank eyes, he was definitely the person Kiritsugu had seen before in the pictures.

Their eyes met, and those eyes squinted in shock and fear.

The trigger was pulled – and the Weatherby Magnum V Rifle annihilated that face. The magic circuit – which had been holding the body together – lost contact with Zepter's brain, broke off and stopped functioning.

As a result, the body became wobbly like a lump of meat, and crumbled down.

"Ahh, it stinks! Smells like vomit."

Standing up abruptly, Natalia flinged the scattered muscles and arms around her, and started searching for her target.

"Boy, you help me too. The magic crests should be here somewhere."

The secrets of magic which the Zepter family engraved onto their own bodies. If one was to sell that, he could live very comfortable for quite a while.

After all, Natalia was quite extravagant with her spending (she would buy houses or shelters here and there on a whim; she called them "hiding places"). So if that could last for two months, it would be great.

In the end, the one who found the magic crests engraved on the mummy-like corpse was Kiritsugu.

"……"

He was about to call out to Natalia, but he hesitated. This heretic magecraft was too dangerous. It wasn't about reviving the dead, but creating a new living being from the dead. Is it okay for such magecraft to be inherited, by any random person?

Those were his trains of thoughts.

He thought quickly.

You're gonna betray your teacher? A small voice resounded in his mind.

But, that was countered by another voice…

– Hey Kerry, what do you want to grow up to –

No longer hesitating, Kiritsugu inserted that hand deep into the rotting flesh.

“Found it?”

“Nope…..nothing. I couldn’t find it.”

He lied naturally, not revealing anything abnormal. He was even surprised at himself, who was able to lie perfectly and naturally.

Natalia heaved a sigh.

“If we continue looking, we should be able to find it. But it’s likely that we suffocate from this decaying flesh before that.”

“So we’re giving up on the search?”

At Kiritsugu’s question, Natalia nodded reluctantly.

“Before we go back, let’s incinerate all these.”

He walked on into the cavern, and turned back. The magic crests were somewhere in this pile of rotting meat, but…

Kiritsugu threw the incendiary hand grenades successively. The meat started burning abruptly; the flames incinerating all that’s left.

“This should do it.”

In the end, Kiritsugu whispered that.

After exiting that cavern, they affirmed that the two thousand villagers had turned into lumps of meat. Death, death, death – no, that wasn’t even death. What’s left here was just *the shadows of humans – mere refuse.*

– And, at this moment, Emiya Kiritsugu was driving in the car.

Until a moment ago, Natalia had been grumbling “What a huge waste of effort! A huge deficit!”. But probably being exhausted by the overuse of prana, she went to sleep again.

Whilst looking at her sleeping face, Kiritsugu thought about it.

Is it correct to do something for your own sake? He had no doubts about that. A heretic magus who sucked away the lives of two thousand people – There was no need for such crazy man’s crazy magecraft to be passed onto someone else.

That magecraft…must be destroyed.

What troubled him was that he had lied to Natalia. Moreover, despite her sharp intuition, she did not realize it.

Stepping on the gear, Kiritsugu accelerated the car further. *Oh well, I’ll wait for the next job. I’ll definitely save someone the next time.*

Nothing was left behind in the village after Natalia and Kiritsugu left that village. The buildings were completely destroyed, and the name disappeared from maps. A few days later, even “death” disappeared from it.

“Present Mountain” – no one remembered this village anymore.

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